

Summary of the Wisconsin Student Assessment System

Background:

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has a long history of administering standardized assessments for the purpose of measuring student achievement. Act 269 of the Wisconsin Legislature established the requirement that districts administer knowledge-and-concepts examinations for five content areas in Grades 4, 8, and 10. More recently, under the federal education law No Child Left Behind (NCLB), we have been required to administer annual tests in reading and mathematics for Grades 3-8 and once in high school. Currently, there is no statewide testing in K-2.

The early versions of the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE) were commercial shelf tests that included ACT's EXPLORE and PLAN assessments, as well as the SAT-8 series developed by what is now known as Harcourt Assessment. For the last ten years the WKCE has used TerraNova test items developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill (CTB) in conjunction with test items developed by Wisconsin educators. Until 2007-08, a portfolio assessment was administered to students with disabilities. In order to meet NCLB requirements, we now administer a standardized test, the Wisconsin Alternate Assessment for students with disabilities (WAA-SwD).

- Please note that while the US Department of Education has recently allowed Modified Achievement Standards tests, also known as a "2% test," they do not provide any funding to develop or administer these assessments. As such, the WSAS does not include a 2% test. Wisconsin does, however, have a grant to explore for whom a "2%" test might be appropriate.

CTB is the current test vendor for the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS), which includes both the WKCE and the WAA-SwD.

Item Types:

The WSAS includes a variety of test questions, including selected-response (multiple choice) and constructed-response (short answer) items, however the tests are primarily multiple choice.

Purpose:

Wisconsin's annual assessments are summative in nature and were designed to measure grade-level knowledge and skills in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and writing. The tests are not currently designed to be year-end assessments, as the state tests are administered in the fall. As such, the tests measure what students are expected to know at the beginning—or in the fall term—of their current grade. DPI does not currently play a role in formative or benchmark assessment.

Standards & Assessment:

Ten years ago Wisconsin approved formal academic content standards for Grades 4, 8, and 12. The adoption of content standards brought a series of significant changes to Wisconsin's assessment program following a 2001 alignment study between the tests and the state's Model Academic Standards. Customized test items were added to the WKCE (augmenting existing TerraNova questions) to ensure that the assessment was fully aligned to Wisconsin's state standards. Customized test items did not need to be added to the Grade 10 test because DPI used completely Wisconsin-customized questions from the High School Graduation Test item pool¹.

- The state is currently revising the Model Academic Standards in reading and mathematics to delineate what is expected of students at all tested grades (not just Grades 4, 8, and 12). It is anticipated that this work will be completed in Summer 2009.

The WAA-SwD is linked to the Model Academic Standards through the Wisconsin Extended Grade Band Standards, which were developed by educators and approved by the state superintendent in 2007. The Extended Grade Band Standards address the “essence” of grade-level standards.

NCLB:

The first year of annual testing under NCLB began in the 2005-06 school year. This brought significant changes to the state-assessment program as we began testing all students in Grades 3-8 and once in high school (Grade 10, per Wisconsin law). In preparation for annual testing, Wisconsin developed Assessment Frameworks in reading and mathematics. The frameworks extended the expectations for student knowledge—specified in the *year-end* Model Academic Standards—to the WKCE tests, which are administered at the *beginning* of grades 3-8 and 10.

The state also developed completely-customized item banks for reading and mathematics, which were used for the first time in 2005-06. As a result of this, a scale customized to Wisconsin expectations replaced the nationally normed TerraNova scale for all subjects beginning in 2005-06.²

Reporting:

With the transition to new tests and a new scale, WKCE results began to be reported primarily on a criterion-referenced basis (student performance reported in relation to grade-level expectations), rather than on a norm-referenced basis (student results reported largely in relation to other students' performances through the use of percentiles).

WSAS results are reported in terms of four proficiency categories: *minimal performance*, *basic*, *proficient*, and *advanced*.³ School and district performance—in terms of the number of students who are proficient or advanced—is reported to the US Department of Education for purposes of

¹ The High School Graduation Test was developed, and its items were field-tested, but it was never administered as an operational test due to a repeal of the program by the Wisconsin Legislature.

² Cut scores for the new scale were equated from the TerraNova scale using a procedure known as equipercentile equating.

³ Performance levels are based on cut scores that were established by a standard-setting process involving 200+ Wisconsin educators, business leaders, and citizens who were knowledgeable about the content areas, grade levels, and student population being assessed.

NCLB accountability. Currently, Wisconsin reports snapshot data (one point in time); we do not report longitudinal growth of students (over time).

From the time all test materials are returned to CTB, it takes approximately 10 weeks to issue the score reports of individual students. It takes an additional 4-8 weeks to produce school and district reports. A variety of student-level, school-level and district-level reports are produced. Print copies of student-level reports are sent to schools and districts by CTB. Non-public summary and student reports are available online to authorized users of DPI's online reporting system. DPI also provides public reporting of test results online at WINSS (<http://dpi.wi.gov/sig/index.html>).

Test Delivery:

The mode of test delivery is paper and pencil. Schools currently have one month to test students. The WSAS test window is established by DPI and generally spans the month of November.

- The test schedule has evolved over the years, with fall testing windows in effect from 1992-1997; a move to February test administrations in effect for the 1999-2002 school years, and then a return to fall administrations from 2002 to the present to address NCLB reporting requirements.

Accommodations:

Students who require accommodations are allowed to use approved accommodations that provide access to the assessment, without changing the skill or construct being measured. For example, DPI provides translations in Spanish and Hmong, and allows local translation of other languages. Students with disabilities may have accommodations per documentation in an IEP or 504 plan.

Teacher Input:

Each aspect of Wisconsin's statewide testing system includes significant involvement of Wisconsin educators and stakeholders. Wisconsin educators play an integral role in the development of academic content standards, achievement standards, and test items on the assessments. Educators with diverse geographic, demographic, racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds across the state participate in test-development activities. Special-education and English-language learner representation is also ensured at all stages of test development and review.

Funding:

Federal funds under Title I currently fund 75% of the assessment program. State funds cover 25% of the Wisconsin Student Assessment System.